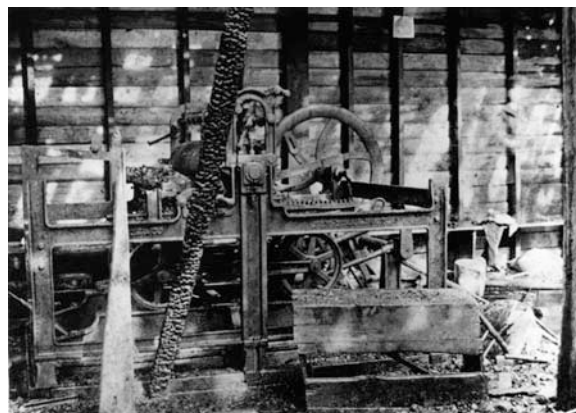


small roof fires on nearby houses.²⁸ The fire crews were stopped at Sixth and Castle by W. T. Savage on orders of Fire Chief Charles Schnibben until it was certain that the building was destroyed beyond repair.²⁹ Once the all-black fire crew was allowed to approach the scene, they were met by a barrage of shouts and a “fusillade of gun and pistol shots.”³⁰ The whites watched as the firemen fought to douse the flames. Later accounts by observers admired the fortitude of the fire fighters who did their job in spite of harrowing circumstances—taming a raging fire in close proximity to other buildings under the watchful eyes of hundreds of armed antagonistic men.³¹ After the fire was extinguished, some whites stopped a moment to pose with their rifles in front of the destroyed building.

The black community reacted in a multitude of ways—children at a nearby school were running through the neighborhood in a frightened panic, and an elderly lady stood on the street and “invoked the wrath of Heaven” on the perpetrators even as they worked to destroy the press and building.³² Fire crews tore down the remains of the building after the crowd dispersed.³³ Although the number of participants swelled to as many as 2,000 at the time the press began to burn, many whites were not a part of the march on the

press and were alerted to the violence by the sounds of gun shots, fire bells, and shouts.³⁴

Waddell and the men present at the press destruction then re-formed their lines and returned to the armory. There, Waddell counseled the men: “Now you have performed the duty you called on me to lead you to perform. Now let us go quietly to our homes and about our business and obey the law, unless we are forced in self-defense to do otherwise.”³⁵ But Waddell’s cautions fell on deaf ears for there were already roving clusters of armed men in a state of recklessness throughout the city. The white supremacy monster that he and other members of the Democratic Party had spawned, and previously held in check, had exceeded their control.



Remnants of *Record* printing press
Image: New Hanover County Public Library

Once the press was destroyed, the city entered a state of panic. Women and children were ushered inside behind locked doors and windows, and workers of both races rushed to the city’s center to ascertain what had happened. With telephones and

²⁸ Henry West, “The Race War in North Carolina,” *The Forum*, Volume XXVI, 583-584

²⁹ Hayden, *WLI*, 86; Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 113. These men were part of an all black fire station, the Cape Fear Steam Fire Engine Company. The company was organized in 1871 and was the first all-black steam fire engine company in the US. Schnibben and Savage both were possibly members of the Red Shirts and White Government Union. Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*, 186-192.

³⁰ *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 10, 1898.

³¹ Hayden, *Story of the Wilmington Rebellion*, 15.

³² West, “Race War in North Carolina,” *Forum*, 585.

³³ *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 10, 1898.

³⁴ Several witnesses in *Contested Election Case* recalled seeing smoke and hearing the fire bells. Cronly included the shouts and fire bells in her recollections.

³⁵ McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 697; Hayden, *WLI*, 86.